

Mining company's offer gets mixed reaction in Waihi

Residents' groups still have concerns over compensation for homeowners

by Jamie Morton

A long-awaited compensation offer for a huge mining development beneath Waihi has met with mixed reaction from residents' groups.

For several months, the Hauraki community has been waiting for a compensation plan that gold mining giant Newmont Waihi Gold would offer over its proposed Correnso mine, to be built at depths of up to 350m below the east side of township.

Under the plan, unveiled this week, affected homeowners would receive compensation for mining activities depending on how close they lived to the project area.

They could also get payments for any damage to their properties.

A NWG spokesman has indicated annual payments of \$5000 to \$6000 to homeowners directly above the mine, and from \$250 to \$3000 for those less affected.

The company has also offered to buy out a limited number of affected houses each year, covering legal and moving costs.

Through a top-up scheme, the company would also ensure those affected would receive a fair market price if they opted to sell.

Other parts of the policy included contributions to the Waihi East community and the establishments of a community forum and panel of independent experts.

It comes after residents groups put their own demands to NWG — one proposal asking for \$100,000 payouts for affected residents who decided to leave the area and ongoing annual \$25,000 payments for those who stayed.

But one resident, Trish Allen, whose home is above the proposed

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- Any damage to home or contents will be paid for.
- The company can buy out six to 10 properties on the market each year for the next two years.
- The company will provide the difference between a buyer's fair price and the seller's fair market value on the sale on a limited number of affected properties.
- Three types of compensation will be provided to homeowners affected by mining activities and effects. Mine employees and contractors will also qualify.
- The company will contribute to schooling, home heating and community improvements within the project area.
- A new forum will act as a go-between for the council, the community and the company.
- A new panel of independent experts appointed by the forum will address damage claims, top-up requests and the property purchase fund.

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Resident Trish Allen

Correnso mine, told the *Herald* she was happy to receive anything.

"I'm definitely concerned about the value of my place and I got the feeling the mining company wasn't going to come to the party . . . so this is quite good news."

Graham Walker, representing the more than 40 fellow affected homeowners, was still to read NWG's full package but said it appeared the company had addressed some concerns.

He is to go over the policy with company representatives this week.

Resident Anne Marie Spicer, who has been closely involved in consultation talks, saw the offer as a good start.

"It's a way forward in terms of the company obtaining a social licence to operate in this town."

Collette Spalding, of the Distressed Residents' Action Team, said the offer fell short in some areas.

She felt all affected homeowners should have the option of being bought out whenever they chose to be, and questioned the policy's benefit to the rest of Waihi.

"We'd like to see the wider community benefits and better provisions to sell for those affected," she said.

"We appreciate incremental progress, however we haven't got 50 years to be debating this — we'd like to see something now."

"We think they could have done better and we think there's still room to improve on this policy."

The company has singled out maintaining and increasing property values in the project area as its focus. "We want to avoid potential distortion of the property market brought about by the announcement of our proposals so that people still have choices and don't feel trapped by what they perceive as effects of mining," NWG general manager Glen Grindlay said.

And while the policy will be implemented immediately, the company had yet to lodge resource consent applications for its mine project.

There was no guarantee the consent would be granted.

If approved, the project would sustain around 400 jobs and at least another 350 indirectly, ensure continued economic growth in Waihi until at least the end of 2020, and open the door to the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in the region.